1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 235-C]

latter little is known in detail. Song is sometimes used when legends are told and is frequently mentioned in them. Dance and mime are even more closely connected. 53

The subject matter of Mbuti drama seems to correspond, as might be expected, with our classification of the subject matter of legends, but the former places greater emphasis on events of the day, particularly hunting. In default of detailed and accurate accounts of dramatic art and all attendant circumstances, the only generalization that seems permissible is the evident lack of interest in personal problems and a preoccupation with the maintenance of the relative status of the human (Mbuti), animal (villager), and supernatural worlds. 536 [81]

With reference to specialists in song and dance, as with other art forms, some individuals who have greater skill than others achieve a measure of renown for their skill. A mediocre hunter who is a good singer or dancer or legend teller is a far more important person than a moderate hunter who is none of these things. 555 • 53

[NET HUNTERS]

Above all, the outstanding singer, however young (so long as he is a hunter, therefore qualified to participate, of course), plays one of the most important roles in the meeting of the *molimo* society. In the *molimo*, respect for skill in song and dance seem, from the material to hand, to surpass respect even for skill in hunting and for old age. 555 53

RELIGIOUS LIFE

The religion of the net hunters is far less well documented than that of the archers, since little is known beyond what Schebesta (1950) writes of the "Sua" regarding their religious terminology, notions of God, and afterlife. On the other hand, the functioning of their men's religious association (*molimo*) is far better documented than that of the *tore* association of the archers, both in Mrs. Putnam's notes and my own (1960b). 114 [575]

As far as magical practices are concerned, little information is available beyond a few isolated descriptions of various ceremonies mainly concerned with the hunt or the weather. Many practices are certainly of village origin, and some practices that are shared by both groups have different functions. Thus the naturally distorted stick (Fig. 53), known as *amati a oni ganza* (the tortoise saw the circumcision), is for the villagers a magical protection against 789 789 177 824

[P. 235-D]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 236-B]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[p.247-A]

have taken part or not. With Schebesta's archers it seems that the lineage elder is the final authority, below which rank the family heads.

Whereas the status of men is related to hunting ability and to proficiency in the arts of mime, dance, and song, the factors involved in determining the status of women are not clear. Fertility is probably one factor, and, almost certainly, ability as a singer another, for a good singer takes a leading part in the *elima* celebrations. The *elima* itself may be connected with adult male status, since one of its main features is the battle between the young men seeking to gain admission to the *elima* hut and the women guarding it. Married men may and do take part in this battle, but there comes a point when a man has neither the incentive nor, possibly, the necessary stamina. Anne Putnam writes of one elderly Mbuti, still active as a hunter, who was seen to cry during an *elima* festival. In response to a question he answered: "I fought my way into many an Alima hut when I was younger. Now I have no desires. It saddens me" (Putnam, 1954, 218). A young man who does not take part in the *elima* is a subject for ridicule.

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

554 881 The fact that men go through the not inconsiderable beating inflicted on them by the women in order to gain admission, without ever taking advantage of the young maidens then available to them, is another indication of the function of the *elima* in determining male status.

555 224 Male status depends primarily on skill in the hunt; this may be deliberately acquired by individual exploits such as elephant hunting. [439] Among certain bands elephant hunting is a specialized profession, the ivory being used for trade. Among the Epulu net hunters it is not so. It is an exceptional occurrence and, as described by Anne Putnam (1954, 143 ff.), may be undertaken without any thought for the food or ivory, at times when the band has no need of extra meat or of trade with the villagers. On this occasion the Pygmy hunter admits that he was frightened. He describes how he killed the elephant simply because he felt compelled to do so. [325] This compulsion may have arisen in part by virtue of his reputation as a great hunter, and in part from constant opposition between the human world and the animal world, and the constant effort of the Mbuti to assert the superiority of the former.

224 825 This latter aspect was also witnessed in the ceremony described by Anne Putnam (1954, [p 247-B]

2: Turnbull E-8 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

Everyone recognizes that the slightest rift in the band can lead directly to hunger through failure in economic co-operation.

The clown, however, never passes judgment or exerts authority (except through ridicule); he is better considered, in this role, as a professional scapegoat, a person outwardly not deserving respect or authority. Because of his antics, and the Mbuti love of mime, he is popular, but the blame he takes upon himself is often expressed with feeling, and it is only his ability to turn ridicule upon himself and to laugh at himself that rescues him from what would otherwise be constant opprobrium. His status as a hunter is unaffected by his role as a clown, and depends solely on merit.

There is one type of person, however, and there were two examples in the Epulu band, who leans toward the assumption of individual authority. Every Mbuti is nothing if not a powerful individualist who expresses his opinions with force and clarity. But he generally does not claim any support for his opinions other than his own experience and ability. Some men, because of exceptional hunting skill, may come to resent it when their views are disregarded, but if they try to force those views they are very promptly subjected to ridicule. Ekianga and Njobo were two such hunters in the Epulu band. Ekianga was constantly being ridiculed for his matrimonial difficulties (he was a rare Mbuti, with three wives, living in the same camp with his in-laws by sister exchange). Even his elder sister ridiculed him at times. Njobo was sometimes rather unkindly ridiculed for infertility. Out of four successive wives he only managed to sire one child, a son, who became crippled in adolescence with tuberculosis of the leg. His current wife had given birth to a daughter who out of politeness was generally accepted as Njobo's, though all the evidence pointed in other directions. He was, at least, accredited as the social father.

Of the two, Ekianga probably had the more influence in the band, and his unique position as a polygamist was undoubtedly related to both his prowess and his pride. There is, however, no parallel with the situation acutely described by Lévi-Strauss (1955, pp. 325–39) for the Nambikwara. Ekianga was indeed a potential leader, but the band did not derive its major characteristics from him. Still less was generosity demanded of him (in return for his three wives), and by no means was his undoubted dynamism contrasted by a passivity of the rest of the band. Nonetheless, his three wives and all the consequent "noise" were accepted by the band, and although it was not spoken of as an exchange, it was expected of Ekianga that he would be a

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

particular asset in the hunt. This was his world. He had little or no interest in the village.

Njobo, on the other hand, was excellent at dealing with the village and seemingly enjoyed it, for brief periods. He was much closer to the Nambikwara, who "delights in responsibility" and who "finds enough reward in those burdens that their fellows shy away from" (*ibid*). Although his wives were successive, it is worth mentioning that his penultimate wife, mother of his crippled son, was not remarried and was still considered by all, including Njobo, as his senior wife. Although she lived with her natal band, she sometimes visited Njobo (particularly when he was in the village), and he also visited her, at which times they acted in all respects like man and wife. Njobo refused to allow her to live with him in the forest hunting camps.

Njobo's father, Biyonga, had not been outstanding in any way. He had been dead a number of years, and nobody seemed to remember him for any particular qualities.[1] Njobo, on the other hand, was among the finest hunters, and unique in having killed, single-handed, four elephants. He had also participated in successful communal elephant and buffalo hunts, and apart from being a hunter of the utmost courage, he was also a man of the utmost integrity. He possessed, in abundance, all those qualities the Mbuti admire most except a good singing voice. He himself was modest, and usually self-effacing in the hunting camp. He came to the fore in relations with the village, and frequently acted as "headman" of the band in that respect. However, if ever he spoke too loudly in camp, he was either shouted down or laughed at; ridicule he accepted and even welcomed. I only heard him make a retort once, when reference was made to his son's inability to walk without a stick. He said, "It is never good for one man to talk too much, particularly if he is right. But if an Mbuti has something to say, what else can he do?"

Njobo had no brothers, but his sisters had produced a number of children, several of whom, married and single, were members of the same band. The only sister who was in the band was a widow, and her children were elsewhere. She acted as mother to all her nephews and nieces, among which were two youths, cousins to each other, and each recently married. When Njobo was away from the band for a

[1] Although there was a general reluctance to mention the dead by name, or even to talk about them, there was no rigid prohibition. It was a question more of there being no particular occasion for such mention. If Biyonga had been exceptional in any way, it would certainly have arisen sooner or later in ordinary conversation, and equally certainly in response to questioning.

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

atmosphere was so tense I wondered if there was at last going to be a real accusation of witchcraft, though from what I had seen the Pygmies had no great belief in such things. But Moke's first words put me at ease. Choking back a little sob, he managed to say in a matter-of-fact way, "She died well."

There was a general nodding of heads. Manyalibo, who was a nephew of Balekimito's, said in his gruff way that everyone should be happy that she had lived so long, happy that she had died so well, and that all this wailing should stop at once. He added that the death was a "big thing," and that it was a "matter for the forest." There was a silence, and, looking around to make sure that there were no women about, Manyalibo announced, "I shall call out my molimo, and we will feast not for a week but for a month, or two months, or even three; we shall feast the molimo and make the forest happy."

Njobo, the great elephant hunter, had the final say. He stirred the fire idly with a stick, sending showers of sparks and ashes up into the warm air. "We have been in the village too long," he said. "We should have gone back to the forest before; that is where we belong. Now we must go back, far away from the village and from the people of the village. It is a bad place."

He said that a few would stay behind to finish the work on my house, but that the rest of us should gather together all the food we could and be ready to move within a couple of days. The next day we would put Balekimito in the ground, and maybe the day after that we would leave.

At this everyone cheered up visibly and began criticizing the women and children who were still pouring in and out of Ekianga's house, beating themselves and crying. Masisi said crossly that they would never behave this way if they were in the forest, and as he talked he raised his voice until he worked himself into a real temper. He stalked out of the veranda and down to the far end of the little